

CHILD'S MIND



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CHILD'S MIND

Mental health promotion in early
childhood education and child health clinics



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Helsinki, January 2015

Elina, Susanna, Soile and Marjo

FOREWORD

You are holding one of this year's most important books. I hope that like you, every early childhood education and care (ECEC) and child health clinic employee will find it and gain understanding and help for their extremely important and deeply humane work. The guidebook is a compact and comprehensive, warm and heartfelt, beautiful and stirring introduction to developing a healthy mind for a child. It is also a practical guide for those skills we, as adults, need to allow us to support children in their development into happy and balanced individuals: into children who have the capacity to find joy, creativity and be active as well as for well-meaning sociability.

The book has been written throughout with a respectful attitude towards children and their parents. In the book, mental health is described as a resource, which helps us cope with our daily life, work, learn new things and feel well. In that, the book brings a welcome breath of fresh air, because our society tends to still emphasise problems and failures and often forgets about resources and effort. At its worst, that may lead to parents and children having the cumulative experience of being unable to good enough or not being able to bring joy, which in itself is a marginalising experience. By teaching how to strengthen positive spirals, the guide shows us how to avoid the threat of exclusion at the early stages.

The structure of the book is excellent, visual, motivating, thought-provoking and inspires new practices. It discusses all the core areas. The book starts from the rhythmic, melodic and playful nature of early interaction and moves onto the lively and creative chaos of play as well as to physical exercises and art. The needs of developing children are demonstrated in an approachable and warm way. The book covers the different dimensions of the relationship between an adult and a developing child in various practical situations: intimacy and rest, the joy of spending time together and daily rhythms, showing approval and discussing emotions. Adults also receive valuable advice on dealing with children's crises.

Elina Marjamäki, Susanna Kosonen, Soile Törrönen and Marjo Hannukkala have written and edited a superb book. I can highly recommend it to not just professionals but also to parents, grandparents, godparents: to anyone sharing the daily life of a developing child, thus, allowing them to strengthen the foundations of the child's mind.

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PREFACE

Mental health is a skill, which we can learn and teach to others. Child's mind – Mental health promotion in early childhood education and child health care clinics and its supplementary material provide knowledge and skills that help promote small, pre-school-aged children's mental health, which we, as adults, have the responsibility to teach and convey to them.

At the Finnish Association for Mental Health, we have modelled these skills as mental health skills. It is important to teach them at home and in our daily work with children. It has been said that those who work with children are at the forefront of mental health work in society.

It is beneficial for children's mental health that parents and those working with children know how to take care of their own mental health skills and are able to convey them to the children at home and at work.

The book has been written for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals and public health nurses at child health clinics. The book also includes ideas for pre-primary and elementary education. The aim of the book is to inspire and encourage those working with small children to acknowledge the importance of mental health promotion to our general well-being. The contents of the book and its exercises provide ECEC and child health clinic professionals opportunities to utilise mental health promotion themes as part of their work with children and their families. The material also helps us understand that mental health promotion is already being carried out every day, because these themes are included in the acts and decrees guiding ECEC and health clinic work.

ECEC and child health clinic professionals have numerous opportunities for strengthening the mental health of small children. Mental health skills can be introduced to families in parents' evenings, discussed in maternity and child health clinics and taught to children in early childhood and pre-primary education. This helps strengthen children's growth and development.



Child's Mind Materials package

The resource-based material to promote mental health to be used by ecec and child health clinics includes:

- Child's mind – Mental health promotion in early childhood education and child health care clinics
- Posters: Pinwheel of Wellbeing, Hand of Mental Health, Ferris Wheel of Emotions, Being Together, Children's Safety Net, Dealing with Worries
- Series of tools for child health clinics and ECEC
- 'Lovely Art by Venny and Eero' pack of art cards for children
- Friendship skills cards (also available at the Finnish Association for Mental Health website)
- Story booklet and separate characters: Animal children's life – Mental health skills



INFORMATION TO MATERIAL USERS

Contents of the book

Mental health promotion and the resource aspect of mental health in child health clinic work and early childhood and pre-primary education are introduced through the following themes:

- Connection, presence and love
- Developing child
- Children's safety net
- Empowering emotions
- Joy of being together
- Daily rhythm
- Self-esteem
- Crises and coping
- Rest

Each chapter includes a tool image as well as a song, game, physical activity and an art exercise. The chapters end with an artwork to match the theme and a caption to introduce the piece of art.

Tools for teaching mental health skills

MUSIC

The idea behind the songs and musical activities is that music belongs to everyone. The music sessions have been designed so that they are easy to implement. We want to encourage those working with children to utilise music as much as possible. Music is a wonderful way to share information, skills and emotions and a means to boost a happy mood.

PHYSICAL EXERCISES AND GAMES

The physical exercises and games offer a way to deal with the themes in the book, strengthen grouping and create a pleasant atmosphere of intimacy.

ART

Each chapter includes an art image and exercise. They explore the chapters' themes and help stir discussions on mental health skills. The art images include Venny Soldan-Brofeld's and Eero Järnefelt's artworks from Järvenpää Art Museum's collections. The page preceding the art image features a text explaining the artwork in more detail. The text can be read out loud to children whilst they are looking at the image, or it can work as an inspiration for taking a moment to discuss the artwork with them. The material also includes the 'Lovely Art by Venny and Eero' pack of art cards for children, which has been designed to promote mental health resources through art. The pack of cards comes with a book of ideas on how to use the art cards with children. The pack contains 40 pictures of artworks.

PUPPET THEATRE

The Animal Children's life – Mental health skills through a puppet theatre story book and the six animal figures can be used for dealing with important mental health related themes, such as encouragement, playing together, equality and coping with disappointments. The stories are easy to memorise, or, alternatively, it could be fun to come up with similar stories on topical themes for the group. The stories are based on the forum theatre's workshop, in which an adult acts out the beginning of a story using animal characters and then interrupts the storytelling when the conflict is about to come to ahead. Children can then come up with and act the solution for the story using the animal characters. The story book includes some ideas for potential endings, which might be helpful.

POSTERS

The posters and their tools illustrate mental health skills and their significance to children's mental health. On the reverse side of the tools, the reader will find ideas for child health clinic work and ECEC.

PARENTING CARDS

The cards can be used to stir conversations with parents on child health clinic appointments or in group meetings. They may also be useful in early childhood education.

Wellbeing at work

MENTAL HEALTH MOMENTS CARD GAME

The card game can be used to prompt and maintain a conversation about the themes to promote mental health in work communities' pedagogic cafés, workplace development events and activity planning. The Mental Health Moments card game also supports wellbeing at work.

Towards the end of the book, you will find Reima Launonen's article on vocations and the Meaningful job exercise.

Appendices

The appendices contain Friendship skills cards for practicing social skills as well as a parent evening model and a bedtime story. You will also find the Annual Wheel model in the appendices for planning activities for year-round mental health promotion.

We hope that the *Child's mind – promoting mental health in early childhood education and child health clinics* book and its supplementary material inspire the reader to teach mental health skills to children via games, creativity, music, art and stories.



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